

Republicans Don't Seem Worried About Reports That Trump Tried To Fire Robert Mueller

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Despite reports that President Donald Trump had ordered the firing of special counsel Robert Mueller, lawmakers appear no more likely to take action to protect the man running the Russia investigation.

The New York Times [reported](#) Thursday night that White House counsel Don McGahn threatened to resign rather than fulfill President Donald Trump's demand in June 2017 to instruct the Department of Justice to remove Mueller. The special counsel had been appointed just the month before to oversee the FBI investigation into potential collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

Bipartisan bills that would help protect Mueller from firing have been stalled in Congress for months. And on Friday, Republicans were mostly silent, downplaying the significance of the Times' story and shrugging off calls from Democrats to push the special counsel bills forward.

"The Times story changes nothing," one Senate Republican aide told BuzzFeed News. "Trump thinks about a lot of things."

Two bipartisan bills to protect Mueller, [introduced in August](#), sit largely untouched in the Senate. The Special Counsel Integrity Act, which would allow any special counsel to challenge their firing in court, was sponsored by Republican Sen. Thom Tillis and Democratic Sen. Chris Coons. And the Special Counsel Independence Protection Act,

which would require the attorney general to obtain court approval before firing the special counsel, was put forward by Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham and Democratic Sens. Cory Booker, Sheldon Whitehouse, and Richard Blumenthal.

Democrats say the Times report should give Congress a renewed sense of urgency. “Republicans have told us privately for months that there's no way Trump would fire Mueller, so we don't need to pass any legislation to protect the Special Counsel,” one Senate Democratic aide told BuzzFeed News. “What's their excuse now?”

But the bills have been held up in the Senate Judiciary Committee since a [hearing](#) in September at which witnesses and members [expressed concern](#) over the constitutionality of the legislation.

In a statement, Judiciary chairman Chuck Grassley said he was "open" to working on the legislation in his committee but he didn't particularly see an immediate need since Trump and his lawyers "appear to be cooperating with Mueller."

“I’ve said for a long while now that the President, and everyone else, ought to let Mueller do his job and get through his investigation. Certainly I’m open to considering the bills from my colleagues about special counsels, but before we can bring it up in committee the two current bills need to be reconciled,” Grassley said.

Grassley said the reconciled bill would need "to be examined for any constitutional concerns" regarding separation of powers.

"But if these latest reports are true, it seems to me that they show the president listened to good advice from his advisors. Based on his statements from the last couple weeks, he and his lawyers appear to be cooperating with Mueller."

Daniel Keylin, a spokesperson for Tillis, said both the timeline — senators introduced the bills in August 2017, two months after Trump reportedly ordered Mueller fired — and context are critical to understanding where Republicans currently stand on the bills.

“Since the introduction of the two bipartisan bills, the chatter that the administration is considering removing Special Counsel Mueller has completely come to a halt,” Keylin wrote in an email to BuzzFeed News Friday. “In fact, the president and his administration have spoken favorably of Special Counsel Mueller’s professionalism and integrity, and recent reports indicate the investigation may soon come to an end.”

Keylin said Tillis has repeatedly said that Mueller “is a career professional respected by both sides of the aisle for good reason,” and that the special counsel “should be able to do his job without elected officials trying to score cheap political points for their own partisan gain.”

Keylin said the differences between the two proposed bills “can be reconciled,” but noted, “there are still two challenges moving forward: addressing the constitutionality concerns raised by some members and garnering the support needed to actually move a bill in Congress, which it currently does not have.”

Democrats working on the bills renewed calls to push the legislation through after the Thursday report.

"For months, President Trump, his surrogates, and many of his allies in Congress have worked in plain sight to undermine the credibility of the special counsel and his investigation," Booker said in a statement. "Now we've learned that, behind closed doors, the president attempted to fire the special counsel last summer. The Special Counsel Independence Protection Act was urgently needed then, and it's urgently needed now."

Coons called the reports “disturbing” and alluded to President Richard Nixon’s firing of a special prosecutor during the Watergate scandal. “It is more important than ever for Congress to act to protect the independence of the Department of Justice, including the Special Counsel investigation,” Coons said in a statement. “For several months, I have been working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do just that. These reports make clear that we need to act."

Versions of the Senate bills have been introduced in the House, but face an even steeper battle there.

“It’s hard to get Republican support. You would hope there’d be a time that they put country before party and rule of law above politics, and that time may come,” Tennessee Rep. Steve Cohen, a Democrat who cosponsored the House version of the [Special Counsel Integrity Act](#) along with GOP Rep. Walter Jones, told BuzzFeed News on Friday. “I don’t think they’ll be scheduled [for a vote], that’s the problem.”

“It’s almost like we’re living in two separate universes,” Cohen, who also cosponsored the House’s [Special Counsel Independence Protection Act](#), said. That legislation was introduced by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee last August and has 31 cosponsors, all of whom are Democrats.

Last summer, Senate Republicans [took a firm stand](#) against talk that Trump was considering removing Attorney General Jeff Sessions — who had recused himself from the Russia probe — and possibly Mueller as well.

“If Jeff Sessions is fired, there will be holy hell to pay,” Graham said at the end of July. He added that “any effort” to go beyond firing Sessions and push for Mueller’s removal “could be the beginning of the end of the Trump presidency — unless Mueller did something wrong.”

Republican Sen. Ben Sasse also delivered a warning shot to Trump in a [speech](#) on the Senate floor at the time, with his office telling BuzzFeed News the senator was worried Trump might try to remove Sessions in August, when lawmakers would be out of town, “with an eye toward” firing Mueller.

Neither Graham nor Sasse’s office responded to a request for comment Friday.

“Certainly there ought to be a renewed sense of urgency” said one Senate Democratic aide. “Time for patriots to put country over party.”

Cohen echoed that sentiment. “[Firing] Mueller just depends how the Big Macs affected Trump,” he said. “He could wake up with indigestion, and who knows what he’ll do?”